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A LETTER

ON THE

BELGIC REVOLUTION;

ITS ORIGIN, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES.

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T. C. HANSARD, PATERNOSTER ROW,
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LETTER,

&c.

I CANNOT agree with you, my dear friend, in your opinion of the Belgians cause, and the political situation of the fine provinces of Flanders, Brabant, Hainault, Liège, Namur, Antwerp, Limbourg, and Luxembourg, which, for the last ten months, have been abandoned to the storms of a popular revolution. A long sojourn amongst them, during which I have learnt to appreciate their activity and their perseverance in the useful arts, their political patience, their intellectual progress in the midst of obstacles thrown in their way to stop their course, has given me the opportunity of judging from experience, of the cause of a country which, generally speaking, we are but little acquainted with, and which the periodical press, subjected to the influence of I know not what political manœuvres, has contributed more especially to make us regard in a false light. That there are men whose state and position compel them to infringe upon truth, and systematically to organize falsehoods and calumnies, cannot be denied. They

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have received a special order so to do, which is adorned with some pompous title; but, that writers who are disinterested as to the question, should serve, for a vile salary, and in cold blood, as instruments and accomplices, and thus prostitute their talent and their intelligence, is what can never be excused, and what every honest mind must revolt at.

We disgrace with justice, and punish with severity, the calumniators of a private man; what punishment then should we not inflict on the calumniators of a whole nation? Is calumny less culpable because it is collective? Have not nations, as well as individuals, an honour, which it is their duty to respect? Is it not criminal to attack it? Now, it is with regret I say it, but I must speak the truth, and I will speak it openly, the periodical press, whose office it should be to propagate facts with truth and exactness, to defend with justice and conscientiousness the interests of the people against the usurpations of power, has failed in its trust as regards the Belgians. It has falsified the principles of a revolution which it has not understood. It has shown an incredible eagerness, and a culpable joy in gathering together all the facts calculated to represent the character of the Belgians in an odious light, and to justify their oppressors and tyrants in their designs. And it is upon the testimony of journals, open to the lies of the enemies of Belgium, and of every liberal cause, that you form your opinion of a whole people; it is upon

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their authority that you declare the Belgians ungrateful to their benefactors, and discontented without cause; and that, not having any reason to revolt, they have only obeyed their turbulent and restless spirit; that the government of Holland was gentle, liberal, and paternal, and King William, the model for Kings! My friend, let us be a little less superficial in our judgments, and, however great may be the disposition in all minds to have, at all events, and without much trouble, a decided opinion on all matters, let us not stop at the surface, but sift to the bottom. Do you think that a people revolts thus without cause? Do you think that, without strong and powerful reasons, it breaks all the ties which unite it to the existing order of things, that it interrupts the market of industry, stops the course of commerce, that it puts its wealth, and its very existence in jeopardy? No, no, my friend. A partial revolt, a local rising, may be referred to the passions of the moment, and may not take its source in national excitement; but a revolution, a general and instantaneous revolution, is a remedy so violent and so extreme, that a people must have exhausted all means of gentleness and conciliation, and the state of things must have become insupportable, before they have recourse to it. Yes, my friend, when a whole nation rises as one man—when the mechanic quits his loom, the rustic his plough, the student forsakes his study, the soldier his cockade, the shopkeeper his business, the citizen

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his tranquil and inoffensive life, and all as if animated by one soul join the deep cry of "Liberty"—all affront danger and brave death to attain the prize—it must needs be, that this nation has suffered much and long, that the yoke had become insupportable, and that the measure of its woes has been filled to the brim.

Allow me, then, to tell you, my friend (and friendship alone can excuse such plainness of speech), that only a superficial observer would pronounce *ex cathedrâ*, that a revolution begun with enthusiasm, continued for ten months with singular perseverance, and at last assuming the form of an organised government—treating with foreign powers, and recognised by them as just and legitimate—only a superficial observer, I repeat, would say of such a revolution, that it had no better foundation than the restlessness of the national character. Many impartial judges have been deceived by the circumstances, that the Belgic Revolution did not (like the French Revolution in July) originate in some sudden and evident violation of law, on the part of the existing authorities, that there were none of those striking facts connected with its early stages, which take hold of all imaginations, and justify in all eyes, without further examination or reflection, the insurrection of popular vengeance.

This, however, has not been wanting to the Belgic Revolution in its progress. If the acts of

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aggression did not produce the effect of the "Ordonnances" of Charles, it was because they were subsequent to the insurrectionary movements, and that time had been already given to impeach the Belgians, and obtain their condemnation. The time is not distant, my friend, when full and open justice shall be rendered to their cause; when it shall no longer be matter of surprise that they could revolt and throw off the yoke of the House of Nassau, but rather that they could have supported for fifteen years, and with such patience, a yoke which was so much the more galling, as it pressed upon them at their fire-sides, and in their temples.

I wish you to have a happy precedency in this point, my friend, and that your judgment should anticipate that of posterity—posterity, such is the rapidity of time, is but a few months, whether we measure it by the fluctuation of men or of affairs. I wish to give you an outline in a few words of the numerous wrongs of a generous nation, which understands and practises the sacred laws of hospitality, and towards which I can only pay the debt of gratitude which I owe, by defending her when she is unjustly attacked. You, my friend, who cherish the conception of the just and the true; you who bear in your bosom the soul of a man and a citizen, and to whom liberal institutions have secured the knowledge of national rights; do you listen and judge. I will relate the bare facts,

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without ornament, and without disguise. I will be laconic even to dryness; I will speak to your reason, not to your imagination.

In 1814, when the Allied Powers sounded the magnificent words of Independence and Liberty, the Belgians were not deaf to the cry; twenty years of glory shared with France had not erased the memory of those guarantees, and that Charta, which they had obtained from a despotic government, at a time when the name of Charter was unknown, and their liberties secured by that "*Joyeuse Entrée*,"* which they so much love: proud of their early privileges, they asserted that they, beyond all other nations, were entitled to that independence which had attained a national character, by preserving its primitive purity, even in the bosom of conquest.

When victory was secured, the monarchs forgot their engagements. The Diplomatists, who divided and allotted nations (cutting to the quick with the insensibility of an anatomist dissecting a corpse), heedless of the sufferings and cries of the victim, arranged by a treaty, without any regard to the interest of the parties concerned, that Belgium should be separated from France, and annexed to Holland. Such compulsory unions of nations differing in manners, customs, language, and religion, are rarely fortunate. The Belgians, trusting nevertheless to the experience of the past, impressed

* "*Joyeuse Entrée*" is the title of the Belgian National Charter.

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by the terrible lesson of present experience, and blinded by the splendid name of the House of Nassau, which historical prejudices made them consider as the hereditary friend of public liberty, turned their thoughts from the ruinous conditions of such an ill-assorted union, which the Allied Powers, moreover, had forced upon a defenceless people. What they wanted was liberty and commerce; and these they vainly hoped to purchase at the price of sharing in an enormous debt, which Belgium had not contracted, and the burthen of which was laid on their shoulders; they purchased nothing but chains by the sacrifice. They had hoped for brethren, they found oppressors; and four millions of Belgians became a prey to the avidity of two millions of Dutchmen. Prophetic voices had predicted these calamities; but they were little heeded amidst the illusions with which every one delighted his fancy; when violent commotions have just subsided, a nation is pleased to be lulled with hopes, however delusive, and present evils are thus forgotten.

In 1815, when Bonaparte, like one of Homer's Gods, had bounded at once over the space that separated him from Paris, and rushed again upon Belgium with his veteran battalions, you should have seen, my friend, with what ardour the Belgic soldiers, forgetful of the past, and fighting for their country, resisted the shock of the French army, whilst the Dutch regiments fled from the field like cowards. At the battle of Waterloo they fought

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with a valour which the world has delighted to honour. What was the reward of this noble devotion? How did a new king, who should have made it his duty to gain the affections of so courageous a people, receive the services sealed with Belgian blood, and return the confidence of the nation? By making them drag for fifteen years the heavy chain of hopes deceived; by overwhelming them with annoyances and humiliations; by tearing from them all their rights, all their liberties; and by treating them as a conquered nation, whose crown of oak and of laurel, watered at the purest source of patriotism, fades from its brow.

The treaties guaranteed to the Belgians a constitution, not as a gift, but one to which they had a right. The project of this constitution, presented to the Belgian nobility (whom the king himself, however, had taken the precaution to appoint) had been rejected by them. A majority of the Dutch party—a factitious and fallacious majority—imposed this upon them. The Belgians had a jury: the King, even before he was invested with royal authority, and in the quality of simple Commissioner of the Powers, deprived them of it, by an act of his own will and deed. He abolished the publicity of judicial debates in its most important branch—the examination of witnesses. He kept the judicial order dependant upon him; and, by some premeditated delay in his arrangements, the law by which it was provided that the Judges should not be remov-

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ed, was rendered merely a figure of speech. The independence of some of the Magistrates was the signal for their disgrace; the servility of others was their title to reward from the Crown; so that, instead of being impartial administrators of the law, the Magistrates became the mere tools of the despotic will of the government. All liberty of the Press was destroyed, by the publication of an ordinance, which threatened punishment to the writers, from a year's imprisonment, and six hours wearing the iron collar, to pain of death; and such was the vagueness of the expressions in these ordinances, that the examination and censure of acts of Government (that invaluable right of a free people) were treated as crimes. For fifteen years, whoever wrote with the zeal of a citizen against the abuses which were constantly increasing; whoever set forth the numberless infringements of the Constitution, was pursued and condemned as guilty of exciting distrust of the Government. Imprisonment, fines, and banishment were the lot of any Belgians who dared to take up the pen; while the King—the faithful imitator of his forefathers—kept in his pay foreign writers (who were paid with the people's money) to make eulogiums upon his person and government, and he sought apologists amongst men who had been dishonoured in France upon the scaffold. He imposed taxes without consulting the people. He paralysed the effect of the laws by his own interpretations, the execution of which he insisted

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upon. He expelled, by force, from Belgium any strangers who came under the protecting shade of a Constitution that they believed to be *a truth*, or to demand hospitality of a nation which places this virtue in the rank of its first title to the sympathy of other nations. He took possession of the most important branches of industry, and in opposition to the interests of his subjects, he became by degrees, merchant, manufacturer, stock-jobber, printer, &c. &c. He burthened with exorbitant taxes all the natural productions of Belgium; and in a country principally agricultural, taxes upon bread, grinding corn, cutting wood, and distilleries, oppressed the Southern Provinces, while Holland, which scarcely felt the weight of them, profited by it. He assumed the right of nominating the Magistrates of the towns, and introduced into the municipal regulations what was diametrically opposed to the Constitution. He altered according to his own fancy the Constitutions of the Provincial States, whose determinations he subjected to the *Veto* of a governor appointed by himself. He turned out of place the public officers who had voted in the States General according to the dictates of their consciences, and not according to the suggestions of authority; and as a climax of iniquity, it was ordained that every public officer who had been thus displaced, should be *ipso facto* deprived of all his political rights. He took into his own hands the control of education, and deprived the heads of families of the sacred right of bringing up their children in the

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way that they thought best. It was no longer allowed that any one should give public instruction without a permit. A license was necessary even for teaching reading and writing in private families; to become a Master of the French, English, Latin, or Greek language, it was essential to have a royal permit. Private schools were authoritatively closed, and those Masters who had vainly imagined that nothing was needed but the requisite information, and the confidence of the parents, were banished to the frontiers by the gendarmerie. Nor was this all the infringement upon paternal rights; not only teachers, but particular methods of instruction, particular books and lectures even, were authoritatively imposed; and observe, my friend, that all these books were printed in Holland, and drawn up entirely on the Dutch system, and thus was established a monopoly at once moral, intellectual, and physical, all tending solely to the benefit of the Northern Provinces, and infusing drop by drop into the young minds of Belgium, political and religious principles absolutely incompatible with those of their fathers. From the dame school to the highest classes in the University, every thing was under government regulation. None taught, or were taught, but as the King directed. Having thus taken into his hands all secular instruction, he was not long in getting possession of the religious instruction also. A College was established, in which

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every Catholic Belgian who devoted himself to the ministry of the word of God, was compelled to receive the instructions of government Professors, who were many of them of an opposite persuasion from their own; opposition to this measure was great, resistance was almost universal; patriotic and disinterested remonstrances to the King were not spared; his most confidential agents warned him of the risk which he ran, and of the popular storm in which others had perished before him; they reminded him of Joseph II. and his fruitless attempts at innovation, which caused a revolution; he regarded neither the counsels of experience, nor the lessons of the past; and for many years the Church was without ministers, and the seminaries without pupils.

The last stage of humiliation remained — a species of humiliation which no nation ever forgets, and which it feels even after centuries of oppression and despotism — a degradation which affects the most sacred property of man—the use of his paternal tongue. This sacred right the King took from the Belgians, and imposed upon them a foreign idiom unknown in Europe. In a country where French is the language of literature, of news, of conversation, of the bar, a King was found short-sighted enough in his policy, and tyrannical enough in his contempt of information and civilization, to order, by a simple decree of his will, that French should be no longer the national language, that the Belgians were to unlearn their mother tongue, and

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frame their organs and those of their children to the use of the Dutch! In many of the Provinces, the Belgians were no longer allowed to defend their interests in the Courts, except in Dutch—to treat of national affairs, to hold communion with Government, to draw up public acts, except in Dutch. The father of a family was compelled to make his Will in a language every word of which required a translation. No man was admitted to any office (even in those Provinces in which French was universally spoken), until he had served his apprenticeship to the Dutch. The oldest statesmen, who had grown grey with honour in the administration, were turned out of office. Experienced barristers, notaries, formed by twenty years' practice, church advocates, sergeants—all were obliged to relinquish their situations, and seek new means of earning their bread, or fall into beggary; Judges left the bench, government officers their places, Professors their chairs, and Officers their epaulettes. Whole provinces resounded with unanimous and energetic complaints; King William was deaf to their entreaties. This primary iniquity involved a second equally disgusting. Treaties (and if there had been no treaties, Reason, Justice, and Equity), required that Belgium and Holland should be treated on a footing of equality, and that a just distribution of honorary and lucrative employments should be made between the two great divisions of the kingdom. So far from it, that all public offices,

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from that of the Minister of State to the lowest Commissioner (I should rather say, to the very door-keepers and porters), were filled by the Dutch. To be born a Belgian was an original sin which excluded from all public employments. Home affairs, foreign affairs, public education, finances, custom-house, the army, all was in the hands of these Benjamins of the North. In the artillery, out of one hundred officers, eighty were Dutch; amongst the engineers there were only ten Belgians; the superior officers in the troops of the line were in the same proportion; and this preference was the more cutting, as real military talent was principally on the side of the Belgians. The soldiers were already disposed to revolt by the necessity of obeying commands in a foreign language, and by the degrading hardships which the Dutch military code inflicted. The partiality of King William towards his Dutch subjects soon extended its influence from persons to things. All the great national establishments of the kingdom, the High Military Court, the Syndicat of Mortmain, the Council of Catholic Worship, the Supreme Council of the Nobility, the great Military Schools, the Commercial Society, were summoned in Holland. Even the institutions which belonged expressly to the Mines and their superintendance, were established in a country where there is not a foot of ground containing a mineral. The position of the High Court of Justice was not yet determined,

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and official memorials were laid before the King, showing that there were four times as many law-suits in Belgium as in Holland; that the difference was occasioned by the number of the inhabitants, by the nature of their transactions, and by the greater sub-division of property; and that it was consequently only fair that the High Court should be established in the Southern Provinces; reason, justice, calculation, memorials, all or none, it came to the same thing; the King had determined that the Belgians should plead their causes, as a final appeal, in his good town of the Hague.

This is a long list of grievances, my friend, and yet I am far from the end of my tale; I have not yet mentioned the grasping spirit of the Administration, nor the immoral laws which were carried by a Dutch majority, nor the barbarous system of legislation which menaced Belgium, and reminded one of the horrors of the 14th century; nor of the infringements upon personal liberty, by a decree which authorised the imprisonment of a man of good family, upon the mere dictum of a President of a tribunal; nor of the infringement upon property by Royal edicts, granting to debtors an arbitrary remission of the claims of their creditors; nor of monopolies of certain branches of trade (such, for instance, as the herring fishery) granted to Dutchmen; nor of the Custom-house regulations, which were ruinous to Belgium; nor of the annual increase of the taxes in a time of profound peace,

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and with such a frightful progression, that Belgium was then paying four times as much as she had contributed to the revenue of Napoleon, during twenty-five years of war; nor of the increase of a debt already enormous, and the repetition of a deficit which successive loans never replaced; nor of the disgusting and ruinous partiality in paying off the anterior debt—a partiality carried to such an extent, that the Dutch debt was liquidated in 1815, while the Belgic debt, which was comparatively trifling, remains to this hour; nor of the scandalous appropriation of a million of florins, which was voted by the States General for the purpose of encouraging national industry, and employed by the King for the purposes of corruption, and the hire of foreign agents; nor of the arbitrary methods by which the turnpike dues were withdrawn from the Provinces, though they were at the same time charged with repairing the roads; nor of the maintenance of a standing army; nor of the grievance of a militia of five years service, which robbed the agricultural interests of its best hands; nor of a guard called the "Schutterye," subject to the most vexatious arrangements—a volume would not be enough to unfold all these abuses, and you and I, my friend, have not time to write or read such a catalogue.

For many years the severity of the judicial prosecutions had compelled the nation to be silent, and there were only a few courageous voices, who in

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the midst of the national representation, raised the accents of complaint. But in 1829 and 1830, new severities and new condemnations, a perseverance, or I should rather say a stupid obstinacy, in continuing abuses, tired the patience of the people. Then, my friend, that union between the Catholics and the Liberals took place, which was combated with a fury plainly showing how dangerous it is to despotic governments; and an union which was so misunderstood, that it has been described to the stranger as *monstrous*, and the principles of which will finally overspread the whole world. Men who were separated by their religious and philosophical opinions, and whose dissensions the Government had taken pains to foment and cherish, and turn to its own advantage, perceived, at last, that in this general wreck of all liberty, there was only one path of safety left—a truce to their private disputes, and an agreement upon essential points. They discovered, at last, that they had interests in common; that, besides being Catholics and Philosophers, they were Citizens; and that, as such, they were all equally in want of protecting institutions; that they were alike interested in restoring the liberty of the press, civil and religious freedom, a Jury, judicial independence, the free exercise of their maternal tongue, &c. &c. This union, which, for the first time in Europe, practically realized a tolerance which heretofore had only existed in theory, is an immense step towards that better order of things to which Bel-

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gium has had the good fortune to lead the way. It is not for you, my friend, who are such an eager defender of the emancipation of the Catholics in England, to blame the principle of it; for there is no more inconsistency in a liberal Belgian's uniting with a Catholic to obtain his liberty, than there would be in a Protestant in your country doing it to carry the Bill. And this happy alliance of men who set aside their old and paltry quarrels, to effect the liberation of their country, soon produced a good result. The outcry for the establishment of the promised institutions was no longer confined to the writers and representatives of the country; the whole nation uttered their complaints in concert, and stated their grievances; thus depriving the King of all pretext of ignorance, which he always pleaded. Petitions were addressed to him from all parts, as well as to the national representation; from every side they demanded the full and entire execution of that Constitution which the Government had prescribed, and whose liberal tendency it had carefully eluded. The expression of discontent was general. It was then that the people of Belgium were witnesses to a novel phenomenon in the conduct of representative governments.

The numerous petitions were made so many lists of proscriptions for the citizens who had signed them. The King even treated those Belgians who had made use of their constitutional right, as seditious and infamous. Those who held public offices

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were turned out, and those whose rank and fortune placed them beyond the reach of Royal displeasure, and whose substantial interests he could not affect, were banished the Court. Presently after, a Royal Message came to the National Assembly, in which King William intimated thus his will and pleasure;—that he derived his authority solely from God, and from his ancestors; that the Constitution was an act of his good pleasure, and not the realization of a national right; that his decisions were not to be restrained by an idle ministerial responsibility; that he would not re-establish the Trial by Jury, a foreign innovation in our customs; nor leave to the Press such supreme power over affairs; that he would govern by himself; and that he knew how justly to appreciate the *pretended* troubles of the nation, or rather of a handful of mal-contents, who insolently usurped the name of nation, and whom he would soon bring to their senses. This political symbol, with the moral and intellectual tokens which he had already given in his decrees, completed the *trilogy* of Despotism; and it was sent to all, far and near, who held government offices, with a formal injunction to adhere to it precisely, and without deceit, or to quit their places. He endeavoured to stifle, by a law of terror, the explosion of public indignation; depriving the deserving of their places and pensions, and commencing thirty-two fresh proceedings against the Press, whilst a go-

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vernment writer, a freed galley slave,* whom the King had taken into his confidence, and glutted with gold, said, "that the Belgians must be muzzled, and treated like wild beasts." Inquisitorial searches, and domiciliary visitations, became the universal practice: any citizens who were suspected of being the authors of petitions were subjected to the inspection of a jealous and accusing police, and threatened as to their means of subsistence, and their liberty.

The severities exercised against individuals soon extended to constituted bodies, and were only the forerunners of a stroke of policy with which the Journals (faithful interpreters of the Royal intentions) had threatened the nation and the States General, if they persisted in their patriotic remonstrances. Insults were then heaped upon the national representation. Its most sacred rights, and most precious prerogatives, were contested. A ministerial candidate† having presented himself to the Chambers, after an irregular election, and the States having refused to admit him, the King signified to them, that he did not recognize their

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* Libry Bagnano, twice convicted of forgery, and branded in the public place at Lyons. This man, who was daily consulted by King William, received in the space of one year more than half a million of francs.

† M. Brugmans, Advocate at Amsterdam.

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right of verifying elections; that the candidate, in consequence of the difficulty that had been thrown in his way, had sent in his resignation as Deputy, and that he had chosen, not out of consideration for the Chamber, but for the Deputy, to accept it; but that, if he had liked, he could have forced them to admit him. The Chamber being over-ruled by a Dutch majority, submitted to this last degree of humiliation. This was not all. An enormous Budget, that the Belgians had firmly resolved to reject, unless it was accompanied by redress of grievances, was (by the majority of a single voice) imposed upon the nation; the representatives suffering themselves to be intimidated by the formal declaration issued by the King, that he could easily compel the Chamber to adopt it! Observe, my friend, the identity of situation with France, but the difference of the result. In France, the Ministry proposes a *coup d'état;* the Chamber resists it; the *coup d'état* is carried: in Belgium there is the same threat; the Chamber shrinks, and the King triumphs. But this triumph throws the nation into consternation, and convinces it more than ever that there is nothing more to be hoped from the Government which has been forced upon it; that the national representation of Belgium is without strength and without power, under the influence of the Dutch majority; that no amelioration will take place; and that the radical fault is in the Constitution itself, and in that iniquitous decree, which had rejected a

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better in 1815, a decree which established a monstrous inequality in the representation, by establishing, that two millions of Dutch should return as many Deputies to the States General, as four millions of Belgians. A burning indignation reigned in all hearts. The feeling excited by this crying injustice was augmented by the pressure of years of servitude and humiliation.

Gloomy discontent and general despair agitated the nation, when it considered the moral and political condition of the neighbouring people. In France the ministry of Polignac, in England that of Wellington, the influence of the Holy Alliance in Germany, of Prince Metternich framing new fetters, and preaching another crusade against the liberties of the people; all combined to certify, that a vast system of oppression was every where organising itself, of which King William was himself one of the most willing agents, and that the crisis was approaching for the people, or for their kings.

Such, my friend, was the moral and political situation of Belgium, when the glorious Revolution of July blazed forth in France. This brilliant spark set fire to the powder in Belgium. But after the facts which I have enumerated, after the conviction that you must have drawn, that the Belgians have for fifteen years suffered as men, as citizens, as heads of families, and as Catholics, all that can hurt the moral, political, religious, and intellectual, feelings of a nation, you will not again repeat that

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the Belgic Insurrection is an imitation, or, as it has been so often termed, a bad parody of the Revolution of July. Without doubt Belgium enjoyed a freedom, a kind of physical happiness, which, compared to the state of many other countries, appeared the height of prosperity, and deceived strangers who only traversed the country, taking it for granted that where the land is well cultivated, and the people are active and industrious, they have nothing more to wish for.

But were they indebted to the Government even for this physical prosperity? Certainly not! The country flourished in spite of the odious measures of Government, thanks to the general peace which all Europe enjoyed, to the increase of industry, caused by the free communication of the different countries, and the laborious perseverance of its inhabitants. This physical freedom, however, is the only title to praise that the Government, backed by its hired writers, attempted to claim. I say it with confidence, and without fear of being contradicted by facts, that never King violated more openly sworn faith and established laws; or disregarded more impudently the rights of his subjects; showed a more profound contempt for all that is good and sacred; or displayed a more brutal insensibility to the humblest remonstrances that were addressed to him.

Never did a people possess juster motives for recurring to the sacred right of insurrection. The

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Revolution was foreseen, and foretold, and would infallibly have broken forth, even if Paris had remained quiet, and had submitted to the Ordinances of Polignac. The King had been warned of it by all men of penetration about him. What had passed in France, where, in three days, the most ancient dynasty of Europe (though still reverenced for the memory of the past) had been overturned; where, in three days, the "final arguments of Kings," (the cannon) had been conquered by the final arguments of the people (barricades): this unexpected catastrophe was well calculated to stop, in its course of oppression, a new dynasty, which the force of foreign bayonets, not the affection, and free and spontaneous choice of the people, had placed on the throne. But the present lesson was of no more avail than the past had been. Despotism, often as it is taught by cruel experience, has this peculiarity, that it remains deaf to counsel, blind to example, and stupidly confident in brute force, which has always been its ruin. When this Revolution at last burst forth, produced, as it had been, by the discontent which was growing in all hearts, and powerfully strengthened by the late severities exercised towards them, how did this nation, so deeply wounded in all its rights and dearest interests, behave? Did it annihilate in *a day*, as it might have done, that authority which had no root in the country, and which had alienated from itself all upright and honest minds? Did it abandon itself, from the first, to the intemperate impulse

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of a just vengeance? No; after the first popular effervescence was calmed, all good citizens, the City Notables, the Members of the States General, of the Provincial States, and of the Municipal Administration, were unanimous as to the necessity of making a last appeal to the King, who had hitherto been deaf to their prayers. Respectful addresses were sent to him from all quarters. Deputations of the most honourable men were sent to him: they all demanded the same thing,—the removal of the Ministry, and the redress of grievances so often complained of, and always neglected. Well, my friend, the addresses were disdainfully rejected; the deputations haughtily dismissed, after having been exposed to the insults of a multitude which was exasperated against the Belgians. The Prince of Orange, who had been received into the heart of Brussels, and there (respected in his person and his rights, might have convinced himself by his own eyes, that the murmurs of the nation were legitimate), was invited to become his father's interpreter of the wishes and hopes of the people. The King of Holland persisted in his obstinacy, and closed his ears to all these representations; but what put the finishing stroke to his perfidy was this—he convoked at the Hague, the second Chamber of the States General; the Belgic Deputies, either to show their courage, for it required some to face the insults of an unbridled populace, or from that dread of revolutionary measures which is natural to con-

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siderate men, obeyed the appointment. This fatal step compromised every thing, and placed Belgium in the most critical position. But it proves how great was the desire to finish the affair by lawful means. Notwithstanding the thousand examples that were before their eyes, how little they knew of the crafty and hypocritical man with whom they had to do! Whilst the Southern Provinces were thus losing by the fault of their representatives a whole long month in useless negociations; while the King amused the people with this absurd convocation of the States General at the Hague, and pretended to wish to treat seriously of separating the Governments of the two great divisions of his Kingdom, he ordered his troops to march upon Brussels; and his second son, Frederic, came to burn its beautiful houses, and to destroy its inhabitants! This, my friend, is the good faith, loyalty, humanity, royal and paternal goodness, with which the Belgians were treated in September last. Then the whole nation, betrayed and attacked while their Representatives were discussing and negociating, no longer set any bounds to its indignation, and found strength in its just rage to repel an army of more than 15,000 men!

Thwarted by popular enthusiasm in this diabolical stratagem (which history will stigmatise with words of fire), the King had recourse to a second manœuvre, in which the Prince of Orange was either his accomplice or his dupe. The King

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despatched him to Antwerp, and there the Prince, professing himself to be fully authorised by his father, voluntarily proposed the separation of the Northern and Southern Provinces; adding, that he should head the popular movements in Belgium, and that it was his wish that the citizens in those Provinces which were occupied by his troops, should proceed immediately to elections for a General Congress, according to the regulations of the Provisional Government. In order to inspire still greater confidence, he established a Deliberative Commission (a kind of Ministry *in partibus*), which lasted for four days at the most, and during whose existence, the Prince of Orange proposed to the Provisional Government an exchange of all prisoners *en masse*. When the Government in return, after replying to the Prince's Proclamation, by asserting that there was no existing authority but their own, required to know the extent of *his* powers to treat of exchange, and how far the troops at Antwerp were under his orders; it forthwith appeared, that he had no power whatever—that this show of authority was only another snare for the easy faith of the Belgians, and that it was either a stratagem altogether, or the result of a supreme incapacity for every thing like political arrangement. Thus, when the hour of danger arrived; when one of the most flourishing commercial towns in Europe ought to have found in this Prince a patron and friend; when honour, humanity, personal interest

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even, should have urged him to save the place from the incendiaries of Brussels, he secretly quitted the town, and left the command of the military to Frederic the incendiary, and to General Chassé, who poured upon Antwerp, upon its magazines, its warehouses, and its superb Gothic buildings, an uninterrupted shower of bombs, balls, and Congreve rockets, for twelve hours together! What had been respected even by the Spaniards of the 15th century, was abandoned to the flames by the merciless Dutch in the 19th!

Can you wonder, after this, that a Royal family who have broken their oaths, given houses and towns to the flames in cold blood, shed the blood of thousands of citizens, tolerated and encouraged atrocities at which a savage would shudder—can you wonder, I say, that such men should be for ever excluded from reigning in Belgium? How could a member of this family ever look at the walls of Brussels without blushing? How could he face a man who had been wounded in the September contest? or the relations of the noble victims who had fallen! And yet, my friend, what wisdom, what moderation, what humanity, did this people shew after their victory! Hundreds of Dutch families had remained in the Belgic towns, either surprised by the rapidity with which events succeeded one another, or struck with the same blindness as their King, when he relied upon reducing a free people by force.—Well! of all these Dutch

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residents, not a single individual was molested in person or property. They walked about openly in the streets; they were not insulted; they were not disturbed by any person whatever. Now, my friend, cast your eye over the newspapers. What do you find there? Furious declamations against the horrors committed in Belgium; counterfeited and hypocritical indignation, which is so ill expressed as to show on its face that it was dictated by interest rather than facts. Belgium, by their account, is steeped in all crimes; the ground watered with the blood of innocent victims of popular fury; terror is the order of the day; law has ceased; force alone governs. What word of truth is there in this doleful history, which every one seems to take pleasure in aggravating, according to his own fancy? History, my friend, will do them justice against these odious calumnies, when she registers, in her impartial tablets, that the number of these pretended victims, crushed in the streets of Belgium by popular fury, amounts to *one person killed, and another wounded.* The sole crime committed in this moment of popular effervescence was, an attack upon an officer, who, in cold-blooded barbarity, or inconceivable inadvertence, had ordered his men to fire upon an unarmed mob, to whom he had sworn that his regiment was without cartouches, and who were advancing towards them in all confidence, upon the faith of this assurance. Five men, and several children, had already fallen on the spot;

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and this, my friend, was what occasioned the death of the gallant officer. God forbid that in stating these facts, I should try to justify homicide! Popular vengeance is terrific, and ought to inspire us with a just horror. Happily for humanity, happily for the honour of Belgium, this was a solitary crime. Shall I allude to the pillage about which we have heard so much? There has been as much exaggeration in this respect as in the other. Deplorable excesses, no doubt, were committed, but I know of no Revolution exempt from them, and I doubt whether there will ever be a second instance, in which their history can be reduced to so small an amount. No; the Belgians have not lost their well-merited reputation, as the wisest and most moderate people of Europe. I consider it as undoubted, that no other nation would have come out as pure, after a Revolution of ten months; I say no other nation, not even that in which the Chouans were organized, where the people destroyed Churches, laid waste Bishoprics, and threw Priests into the river; not even that, where, in one night, twenty thousand pounds worth of glass were destroyed; and where, for six months together, incendiaries have desolated estates, and laid waste the most beautiful provinces. Not the thousandth part of these excesses have been perpetrated in Belgium. And yet what abuse! What contemptuous expressions! What ejaculations of horror have been lavished, in all languages, upon

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this unfortunate people, who have sacrificed everything for their independence! It was then the interest of a certain great family, and of certain Powers, to pour obloquy upon Revolutionary Belgium, as others had formerly lavished hypocritical sympathy, and profuse expressions of zeal, for her independence. I wish, my friend, that the limits of this letter (which is insensibly growing under my hand) would permit me to describe to you the reverse of the medal which has been held up as the type of our Revolution. I could show you a Provisional Government, establishing itself on the 25th of September, amidst the turmoil of cannon and bombs, without finances, without archives; with no materials for governing a people, who were even then at open war, but pens, ink, and paper, and that courage which patriotic devotion alone can inspire. Five days after its establishment, its authority is recognised in most of the towns of Belgium; on the 1st of October it forms a new magistracy, and justice resumes its usual and regular course; it restores the freedom of the Press, establishes the right of association, abolishes lotteries, annuls those decrees which infringed upon personal liberty; establishes an uniformity of operations throughout the interior; organizes an army; creates financial resources, by continuing the ordinary taxation; and, full of confidence in the wisdom of the people, it convokes a National Congress, directs that the elections shall be held on the most

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popular footing which Belgium has ever enjoyed; and these elections take place throughout the Provinces with a regularity, an order, and a harmony, which excite the admiration even of the enemies of national freedom. For six months this popular wisdom appears undiminished; never were there fewer thefts, fewer infractions of the law than at a time when the licentiousness of the multitude might have been unbridled; they were armed, and no crime was committed; the people were their own police, without any other authority, and without gendarmerie; and, after having nominated their Representatives in the Congress, they proceeded in their respective towns, cities, and villages, to elect their Burgomasters and Sheriffs. It was a noble instance of a nation yet hot with victory, new to its political rights, and yet exercising them all in their most delicate, and what seemed to be their most dangerous ramifications, with all the maturity and reflection of a people who had grown old in the enjoyment of liberal institutions. Never was there more security in the towns, or on the high roads, which were covered with military; and never revolutionary Government showed a more profound respect for persons and property. During the six months that its authority lasted, there was not a single arbitrary arrest, not a single government prosecution, not an act of violence against any individual. No scaffold was reared, and no blood shed in the public places; the Belgic Revolution is

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innocent of this transgression. It is in such cases as this, my friend, that the people are truly sublime! Their resolutions are prompt and spontaneous; their acts pure and disinterested; the salvation of their country alone inspires all hearts; there is nothing personal, nothing selfish, nothing interested in their plans; they have the single-hearted frank devotedness of youth, when it enters into life with a heart throbbing with virtuous emotion, and a head stored with great and noble thoughts; before the freezing breath of worldly care has chilled the rich sap which should produce great deeds and noble self-devotion! The calm discussions of Congress soon succeeded to the tumult of arms, and laid the foundation of the new Constitution of Belgium. Let us here remark, my friend, how much plan and systematic arrangement there was in the conduct of the nation; the first care of the Congress was, to establish those guarantees, the want of which had occasioned sixty thousand petitions to the late Government; and to secure that moral, political, intellectual, and religious liberty, which was the object of all their wishes, and the necessity of all hearts. These important deliberations, in the course of which each member contributed his share of information and thought, proved, even to the most prejudiced mind, that if the Belgians had been excluded from public affairs under the old Administration, it was not for want of capacity; for the most shining talent was developed in this Congress,

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clearly contradicting the charge of political nullity which had been brought against them; and showing that they were in no way inferior to those who had gone before them in the career of liberty.

A second prejudice, not less in vogue (for there are errors which gain such ground as to become common-place), and which must also give way before truth and daylight is, the intolerance of the Belgic Clergy. Will you believe it, my friend, after all the declamation that you have read on the subject, religious liberty, and the broadest principles of universal toleration were proposed, acknowledged, and adopted, not only by the Catholic Laity, but by the Priests who were members of this assembly, and who have been so often accused of ignorance and intolerance? Read the Constitution to the framing and adoption of which the Catholic Clergy powerfully contributed, and then tell me if there is, in any Protestant country, a Charter as wise, as impartial, and as tolerant. Here, again, there was a cordial union between the Catholics and the Liberals; they acted upon the same great principles, and the narrow and exclusive spirit of the Church of Rome was rejected by the wisdom of its Ministers, even in a country which had been abandoned to fanaticism, and to the stupifying influence of superannuated notions and customs. We have here a grand step in the progress of civilization, and one in which Belgium may boast of having taken the lead. Lastly, my friend, the Belgic

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nation has entered upon another career, in which its truth and fidelity have been not less conspicuous, and where it has shewn no less integrity than it had already shewn courage in the field, and prudence in its constitutional labours.

The Plenipotentiaries of five European Powers, assembled in London, proposed to the Belgians, that there should be a suspension of arms, in order to prevent an useless effusion of blood, and to facilitate a definitive arrangement with Holland, on the basis of a separation between the two countries. For this purpose, it was arranged that every thing relating to boundaries was to remain as it had been in 1814. Belgium, though victorious, and able at that moment to have carried her arms into the heart of panic-struck Holland, accepted the proposition.

This, my friend, was the origin of the negociations, which are still pending, as to the boundaries of the different states. Belgium, relying upon the basis laid down by the Powers themselves (the state of things in 1814), refused to consent to any dismemberment, and resolutely resisted the propositions offered in the protocols. How, indeed, could she consent to part with Luxembourg, which has been a part of Belgium for ages, and to place its inhabitants (who, like the rest of the nation, had thrown off the yoke of the oppressor, and fought for the common independence) again in the power of King William? How could she give up Limbourg, and the claim that she had asserted to a part of Maes-

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tricht, in 1790, or before, even when it was in the hands of the Dutch? I allow that there was formerly some room to fear that what she claimed might eventually fall a prey to the French, who were likely enough to covet these fine Provinces; but now that Belgium has given a new pledge of her desire to preserve her nationality (by the election of the Prince of Saxe Cobourg), more favourable conditions will, no doubt, be offered to her; and, worthy as she is of the independence which she has purchased with her blood, she will at last be allowed to take her place amongst the nations, and to contribute, in her own name, her quota to the improvement of Europe. Surely (as has been said before) there is neither senseless obstinacy, nor encroachment, nor the desire of aggrandisement at the expense of others, in demanding what history establishes as your own, and what the identity of manners, customs, language, and political changes, binds yet more strongly to your own lot.

I have stated the facts correctly, my friend, and you know that you may rely on my veracity; I could present myself before Heaven and earth, with my letter in my hand, without fearing that any one of the statements contained in it could be disproved. I am convinced that you, who have often corrected the judgment you had formed on an individual, will find no difficulty in appealing from the decisions of a hired press to your own reason, and judging from more correct statements

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of a revolution, and a people, who will never lose by being examined more closely. There is a heart-felt satisfaction in rising above unjust prepossessions, and doing justice, either to an individual or a nation; you are one, my friend, to taste this pleasure in its perfection. I have every reason to believe that you will be obliged to me for furnishing you with the necessary data, in a letter, written with such haste as to require your indulgence, but at the same time with perfect veracity and deep conviction, which has no less claim to your confidence.

London, 16*th June*, 1831.

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